

Resolution No. 6

Subsidy to Verumpattam tenants of paddy lands

Mr. K. Narayana Menon (*Mulakunnathukavu*): The resolution tabled by me reads thus.—

"This Council recommends to the Government to be pleased to grant to the actual cultivating agriculturist on verumpattam tenure an additional amount of one rupee per para of paddy sold to the Government by him and on his own behalf out of the produce realised by him after satisfying the landlord's dues in kind to compensate the present day costs of cultivation and labour"

When a general question was discussed before this House consistently with this the question of general subsidy was the subject of discussion. The Government came out with a reply which has not given satisfaction either to the House or to the public. My idea then was that if a satisfactory or at least useful answer could be had from the Government I need not press or move this resolution at all. But from the then attitude of the Government it has become obligatory in the interest of the cultivating agriculturist verumpattamdars to move this resolution and to place this before the Hon'ble House. The resolution as it stands, Sir, is one of a very narrow and limited scope. There are persons who are agriculturists who cultivate their own lands. There are persons who hold lands on Anubhogam and Kanam tenures. All these persons are eliminated from the purview of this resolution, and the cause that I put forward before this House is only of a limited class i.e. of the verumpattam tenants who hold lands and cultivate them. And it will not be forgotten that in the present Verumpattamdars Act payment in kind is something which is insisted upon so that what is left actually with the effects of the vicissitudes of the season with the very bad range and high cost of labour and utensils, the scarcity if not the unavailability of cattle-facing all these economic conditions of the most straining nature—the Verumpattam tenant has to cultivate his property and measure out the pattam to the land lord. There may be remaining something or there may not be remaining. I hope and request the Government through the Hon'ble House that their case deserves a better and most sympathetic consideration. It will be seen that the cost of living has ordinarily gone above 300 per cent. The agriculturists like other human beings have also to answer the various necessities of life. He has to pay money and it is a well-known fact that the cost of agricultural product have gone much more than 300 per cent. In this light it will not be proper for the Government to say that we want the last grain that you produce and the last grain that you may save for yourself. The verumpattam tenants stands on a different footing from many other agriculturists. He has to answer his landlords. He has to answer the Government. He has to answer his family. For all these the ordinary income which he has got is too meagre to make both ends meet. I do not think any expatiation is necessary on the object of the resolution and on the face of it I think it will not be opposed by the Government. The Government are doing ever so many things in that direction that was the answer that was trotted out of agriculture. When the general motion was moved in the first session of this Council. I had no opportunity to answer the points then. But I seek leave now to place my humble answers before this House. One point that was raised was that agricultural utensils made of iron are made and will be made available to you through the Agricultural Department, at very cheap rates. If I remember aright, as early as 1118 Meenam, I tabled a question and I got the answer that the matter is being attended to and will be expedited. Till this day, it is my humble experience, that the needs of the agricultural population regarding implements have never been answered as they ought to be.

Next comes the question of cattle. Apart from the methods of black-marketing resorted to even to-day is it conceded that we get sufficient cattle for our private purposes. My respectful answer and my knowledge is it is not. Any number of farms are seen unwatered because of the want of cattle and the little cattle that we get are so costly that an ordinary agriculturist cannot go in for them. There was the Government answer that these cattle will be breeding. We have the old cattle. They are bringing new ones and they will be good enough to be ploughed. That is an answer from the Government which does not deserve a reply. That is my humble answer to that. Government are placing at the disposal of the agriculturists commodities at control rates. I respectfully ask are there commodities available in the market. My humble experience is that they are not. If you go and ask for something you will immediately be told that such and such thing is not available. Unless you go to the black-market and pay the black-market value you will never get the thing. That is the experience. The answers trotted out

by the Government are not at all satisfactory or acceptable—much less of any use to life. I therefore feel that this House is bound in duty to see to the relief of the poor agriculturists. Who is the verumpattam cultivator and who probably gets very little and to compensate him with additional amount of one rupee per para may be paid to him as remuneration. That is the prayer and that is the substance of my resolution. I commend it to the acceptance of the House.

Mr. A. V. Moothedan (Chalakkudi): I second the resolution. I wish to make some modification to the resolution. I agree with the Hon'ble Member when he said that subsidy should be given. The modification that I suggest is that this subsidy should be given to all cultivators who actually cultivate the land. It should not be confined only to Verumpattamdars. What is the justification for confining it to verumpattamdars. There are pangupattamdars and varampattamdars; they also incur all expenses of cultivation and get less yield of paddy. Are they not entitled to get subsidy for the full expenditure. The reason for the subsidy is the high cost of production and people who are cultivating the lands should be given subsidy. I mean Kanam landlords need not be paid. People who cultivate and actually cultivate whether they are verumpattamdars, pangupattamdars or varampattamdars. They should be given the subsidy. With these I support the motion.

Mr. A. B. Salem (Mattancheri): May we know the position of the Government?

Rao Sahib M. M. Paul (Director of Food Supplies): The Government have to oppose the resolution.

***Mr. C. V. Iyyu (Kunnamkulam):** I also second the resolution. The methods adopted by the Government in purchasing paddy has made the actual cultivator a most disappointed being with the result that he cultivate paddy simply to avoid purchasing all these sorts of rotten rice supplied by our ration shops. It is just to avoid that the cultivator cultivates the lands now, without manuring properly, and without ploughing properly and with properly seasoning the grand. Even for this the money by the Government is very insufficient. The Government may very well refer to their own chief agriculturist that is Hon'ble Minister or the Government Officer himself, i.e., the Director of Agriculture what will be the expenditure involved in cultivating one acre of paddy. Undoubtedly the cultivation expenses of the Government will be more than that of an ordinary ryot. If the ryot produces any quantity of paddy, of course, he will be given three paras of paddy per month. Only the balance he will have to pay to the Grain Purchasing Staff. Even less than three paras is paid in many of the localities. In my own taluk even the payment of wages in kind is restricted. There is great discontent among the ryots in that respect also. All these can be solved only by paying higher rate to the actual cultivator. The difference which the Hon'ble Member for Mulakunnathukavu has shown about the actual cultivator and the peasant proprietor or the kanam tenant, of course, I appreciate. The actual verumpattamdar is the person who is in the downmost ladder. Only he represents to that class of tenants who is answerable to his landlords and also to the Government. The Hon'ble Member for Vadakkancheri brought in by way of a cut motion last time the necessity of giving a subsidy to paddy-growers. That also was a very useful suggestion to produce more paddy in the State. I suggest to the Government the payment of a subsidy to rubber-growers as is done by the Government of India. Months have passed and the Government have not studied the situation and have not worked out as a sort of formula. The Hon'ble Member for Vadakkancheri, because he himself is not a rubber-grower, did not bring it to the notice of the Government. I suggest that the Hon'ble Member for Planters may be taken into confidence or the Government may address the Government of India and get particulars of the system which they run. There is a system there. That system can be adopted suitably by paddy-growers. That also has not been done. This is a very easy proposal brought in by the Hon'ble Member for Mulakunnathukavu. This is most practical, and easy and it will encourage the agriculturists to till the soil better and try his best to produce more. The large number of paddy producers in our State are cultivators of the class of verumpattamdars. So we can expect larger yield of paddy every year and the Government which spends a very large sum of money for purchasing paddy from outside the State can also purchase less from outside the State. So I also whole-heartedly support the resolution and wish that the Government should accept the resolution.

Rao Sahib M. M. Paul (Director of Food Supplies): The resolution moved by the Hon'ble Member for Mulakunnathukavu recommends payment of an increased price for the paddy sold to the Government by the verumpattam cultivators, and they alone, out of the paddy they

*Speech not corrected by the Hon'ble Member.

may come to possess after giving credit for the pattam due to the landlord. The rate suggested is Re. 1 per para of paddy. The main reasons that can be urged in support of such a measure are: the increased cost of cultivation due to conditions brought about by war and the consequent difficulty of the verumpattamdar to carry on the cultivation of his land without loss; and the difficulty for such tenants to obtain the necessary money income for buying the other necessities of life, the cost of which has increased several times during the recent years.

2. The question of increasing the price of paddy has been the subject-matter of discussion in the House on several occasions, within the period of the last one year. No one will dispute the importance of this question as the agriculturists are the back-bone of our country and our staple food is rice, for which there is acute scarcity now. Government do realise and concede the necessity for paying an adequate price for the paddy purchased from the agriculturists. The present price of paddy, *viz.*, Rs. 1—6—0 per para, was fixed early in Chingam 1119. Government have since had occasions to enquire more than once, in response to request from the agriculturists, whether that price is adequate.

Mr. P. Kumaran Ezhuthassan (Vadakkancheri): Are the Government aware that the black-marketing is going on at Rs. 1—12—0 and Rs. 2 per para?

Rao Sahib M. M. Paul (Director of Food Supplies): No, Sir.

Mr. P. Kumaran Ezhuthassan (Vadakkancheri): Subsequent to the fixing of price at Rs. 1—6—0 is the Government aware that the cost of labour has increased?

Rao Sahib M. M. Paul (Director of Food Supplies): We do not concede. As a result of these enquiries Government took the view on all those occasions that no case had been made out for increasing the price. The question before us now is slightly different in form from what has been considered on previous occasions. What is advocated now is that an increased price should be paid to one set of agriculturists alone, *viz.*, the actual cultivators of verumpattam tenure, and that only for the surplus paddy that they may come to possess after all their requirements including the land-lord's dues have been met.

In the first place, the scheme advocated by the Hon'ble Mover of the Resolution is difficult to work in practice as it is liable to abuse. There are several land-owners in the State who are cultivating their own lands. Attempts are likely to be made by land-owners to create bogus verumpattam tenures by setting up their nominees as verumpattamdars. Any effort on the part of the Purchasing Officers to conduct investigation in such cases to detect the frauds, if any, will involve much time and labour and impede our purchase work which has to be done most speedily. Experience during the past two years has shown that such bogus tenures can be easily created and documentary evidence also can be fabricated to support them.

Now coming to the merits of the case, there is no sufficient justification for showing a special concession to a particular class of agriculturists alone. As has been explained on various occasions on the floor of this House, one important item of expenditure in the paddy cultivation is the wages of agricultural labour. This is mostly paid in kind throughout the country and allowance is also made for it when paddy is purchased by the Government from the cultivators. With regard to the other items of cultivation expenses, such as manure, agricultural implements, pumping out water, etc., Government would be rendering help to the cultivators in various ways, *viz.*, by subsidising manure, selling ready-made agricultural implements at cheap rates and by contributing part of the cost of pumping for Kole cultivation. For food, which cultivator's family, sufficient paddy is allowed to be retained by him. With regard to the other essential articles he requires, such as sugar, kerosene, cloth, fuel, etc., arrangements have been made by Government to supply these articles to all people at controlled prices. So the cultivator has little reason to complain when compared with his brethren in other walks of life. On the other hand, as was very ably explained to the House during this session, by the Hon'ble Member for Revenue on an allied resolution brought by the Hon'ble Member for Vadakkancheri for giving a money subsidy to paddy-growers, the cultivator of paddy is now in a very envious position in that he has an adequate supply of one of the most essential necessities of life, *viz.*, the food that is required to maintain himself and his family. It has to be remembered that the cultivator was getting the minimum allowance of 16 oz. of rice per adult per day even when the ordinary ration of a non-cultivator included only 4 ozs. of rice. One class of people in the State who has been benefitted by the conditions brought about by War is the agriculturists who own paddy lands or has such lands to cultivate. An enquiry in the nature of the suits and proceedings in our courts of law and also the transactions in the Banks in the State will show that the agriculturists have of late, been clearing off their debts with an astonishing

rapidity. This certainly cannot be if they were not getting fairly good income out of their lands. This is a phenomenon not peculiar to our State but one which prevails almost throughout India.

But the complaint of the Verumpattamdar seems to be that this margin of profit is comparatively small. Assuming to be so, I submit that the remedy is not the one suggested in the resolution. It is well known that verumpattam is the most unfavourable of the land tenures in Malabar viewed from the standpoint of the tenant. The fact that a Verumpattamdar gets a comparatively low net income out of his estate is mixed up with, and inherent in, the nature of his tenure which is essentially one based on contract between himself and his landlord. It would seem to be extremely unwise to attempt to set right any injustice or inequity in this arrangement by any preferential treatment given to him by the Government in the price of the paddy purchased from him. The question would seem to be one which concerns the proper apportionment of the share of the produce of the land between the landlord and the tenant. This is a difficult agrarian problem and has to be tackled separately.

The main factors that should be taken into consideration in determining the price of an agricultural product is the cost of cultivating it and also its market value. To make it depend on the nature of the person who possesses it is unsound in principle. In the present case the article in question happens to be paddy which is the staple food of the people of the country. It is necessary to secure it at a price fair both to the producer and the consumer. It has not been made out that taking the cost of cultivation into account the price now paid is inadequate. As the Government have the monopoly purchase of this article there is no market for it now. It may, however, be noted that the price we pay fairly approximates to the price in the neighbouring countries, viz., Travancore and British Malabar.

Again, for purposes of food, Cochin, Travancore and Madras form one region. It is not advisable also for this Government to fix a price widely different from that prevailing in the neighbouring countries which will be the result if the procedure advocated in the resolution is given effect to. The Government are therefore constrained to oppose the resolution.

The House rose for the day at 5 p.m.

N. S. RADHAKRISHNA SARMA
Secretary to the Council